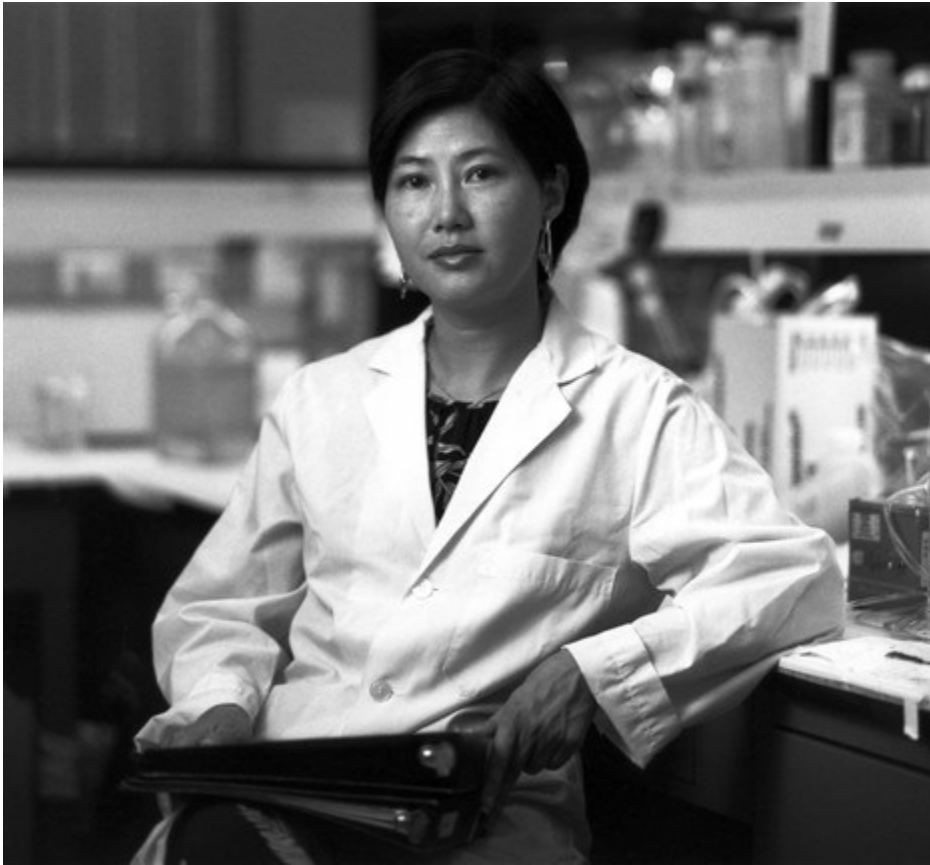


# Dr. Flossie Wong-Staal

Flossie Wong-Staal, Ph.D.



Dr. Flossie Wong-Staal arrived at the National Cancer Institute in 1973 to pursue then-new molecular biology techniques that revealed the workings of cells at the molecular and genetic level. One of her early research projects was cloning and sequencing the first pathogenic human retroviruses ever known to exist, an NCI discovery that also led the laboratory into AIDS research.

In 1984, after the laboratory demonstrated that AIDS was caused by a retrovirus, Dr. Wong-Staal began the molecular characterization of the AIDS virus. There was so much to do, she said, that "Working with this virus is like putting your hand in a treasure chest. Every time you put your hand in, you pull out a gem." Her group's early discoveries include two essential HIV trans-regulator genes, *tat* and *rev*, and the *vpr* gene, whose function was at first unknown but later shown to be the tool the virus used to enter resting cells. They were also the first to obtain a molecular clone of the virus and show that it depleted T cells, a result that provided strong proof that the virus caused AIDS. Additionally, they were the first to describe the genetic diversity of the virus from different patients, both inter-patient and intra-patient, a finding that indicated a standard vaccine would not be possible to make.

Even though she described her years at NCI working on AIDS as "the highlight of my career, that period of discovery, intense discovery," she has continued her research on AIDS, first as the Florence Riford Chair in AIDS Research at the University of California, San Diego, and later as the Director of the Center for AIDS Research and the AIDS

Research Institute for the University of California system. She retired from the University in 2002 as Professor Emerita but has continued to contribute to the field by providing advice and direction to biotechnology companies.

**Transcript of Interview:** [Flossie Wong-Staal, December 7, 1997](#)

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